



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

### **THE ROLE OF CALLING IN MILITARY ENGAGEMENT**

by

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June 2017

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**THE ROLE OF CALLING IN MILITARY ENGAGEMENT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of calling in the military. As the military continues to increase retention goals despite budget constraints, it must adopt ways to better promote career growth and enhance life satisfaction for its personnel. This can be accomplished through recruiting, grooming, and retaining those individuals who have a calling to military service. My study answered the following research questions: (1) Is calling related to positive military career outcomes? (2) Does calling spark and deepen commitment and retention? (3) Does calling promote career growth for those “called” to service? (4) Does calling increase life satisfaction? (5) How is calling related to military retention? Data from surveys of Naval Postgraduate School students reveal many work-related correlations with calling and calling’s positive effects. My research findings suggest that recruiting, retaining, and promoting those who are called to military service will not only decrease turnover, but also provide a better military workforce. I recommend incorporating calling into military employment practices for better human resources results and increased organizational success.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Despite ongoing technological breakthroughs within the military, the consensus is that personnel are—and will continue to be—the military’s most important asset. The men and women in the military form an extraordinary group who often must operate in the harshest environments and face extremely difficult circumstances at home and abroad, especially in forward-deployed environments. Replacing them is not easy, and is also quite costly. Pursuing more advanced or new technology and maintaining it is costly, and even more so are military personnel. For example, it costs the Navy \$300,000 to replace one sailor each year (Ferrol, 2012). Training and benefits constitute the bulk of high costs. Investigating potential positive influences that will increase military personnel commitment and retention can spark further savings—a benefit since the Department of Defense (DOD) is under constant pressure to stay within budget constraints.

Personnel turnover in the military continues to be high—an issue that has yet to be tempered. To curb high turnover, the military needs to retain those personnel who are the most motivated and drawn to military service. This can be accomplished by creating an environment that stimulates career growth and nourishes life satisfaction for military members. Promoting and encouraging these positive attitudes into the men and women in the military may be beneficial, generating retention cost savings while lowering personnel turnover in the long run. Simply put, positive influences can create positive outcomes for the military.

The reality of budget constraints requires financial restraint for all military services. Without an unlimited budget to pay military personnel, part of this financial discipline includes controlling retention costs. The growing need to slash retention costs highlights the value of recruiting, retaining, and promoting those who are most motivated and committed within the service. The military needs to build a stronger foundation upon which to nurture and cultivate the talent of our service members while enhancing their life satisfaction to strengthen and tighten our personnel core. Promoting career growth for

those called to military service now and in the future will create that added value and result in monumental savings for the military.

## **B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In order to achieve higher retention in the military while capitalizing on retention savings, factors that bolster military personnel commitment and retention must be identified, examined, understood, supported, promoted, enhanced, and embraced. To conquer the stark reality of personnel retention challenges, the military needs to be aware of the role of individual calling to military service.

- Is calling related to positive military career outcomes?
- Does calling spark and accentuate commitment and retention?
- Does calling promote career growth for those “called” to service?
- Does calling increase life satisfaction?
- How is calling related to military retention?

People who feel called to their jobs are generally known to have low absenteeism and claim high life and job satisfaction (Hall & Chandler, 2005). This thesis explores the depths of calling to discover any positive outcomes that we can take advantage of to shape better retention and benefit the military as a whole. Becoming more informed about calling can increase human resources awareness while inspiring better decision-makers across the board in any military career path.

Understanding the specific impact of calling helps encourage commitment and reduce turnover. This should be reflected in day-to-day military employment practices. The military can achieve greater retention results while cutting costs if it takes calling into consideration from recruitment through retirement. Furthermore, examining other career-related resources may further strengthen or multiply these positive effects while potentially generating a generous return on investment in the military. If our employment practices are tied to calling, we can achieve greater retention results while cutting costs.

## **C. ORGANIZATION**

This thesis commences with a brief introduction and the purpose of study. The introduction captures a general summary of the research while shedding light on the problem statement and research questions, which will be further examined and explained in subsequent chapters. Chapter II is the literature review, which reveals the comprehensive studies related to calling and other work-related outcomes. The literature review includes organizational commitment, career fit, turnover, life satisfaction, career plateau, social capital, and protean career orientation (PCO). This review highlights literature to generate a better overall understanding of the meaning of a calling, how it applies in various career fields, and how it affects other work-related constructs. Through the detailed literature review, we can understand and relate to the impact of calling in career fields outside the military (e.g., musicians). Chapter III lists the hypotheses of this study, linking the literature review to the research. Chapter III presents the relationships between calling and other work-related outcomes.

Chapter IV describes the methodologies, including a generous sample data collection exercised in this study. The survey design is explained in this chapter. Chapter IV presents the core of data in this research and the positive means of calling in the military within a specific group of the study. Chapter V provides the results of this study, highlighting the key findings and meaningful themes abstracted from individual surveys. Chapter V offers the most relevant and inspiring findings in this research. Finally, Chapter VI offers the direct conclusions and implications of this study, wrapping up with recommendations for areas of further research.

## **D. SUMMARY**

Like any organization, the military wants to experience more positive work outcomes and attain better human resources results. As the military aims to balance disciplined financial fitness and better retention goals, it must adopt ways to better foster career growth and incorporate life satisfaction for its military personnel. This can certainly be accomplished through better groomed and highly promoted individuals who feel they have a calling to military service or who may develop a calling.

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## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. CAREER CALLING**

#### **1. Defining Calling**

Calling is a dynamic, positive work construct. People with a calling find work important and meaningful to them (Cheng & Su, 2013). According to Hall and Chandler (2005, p. 160), “One of the deepest forms for satisfaction or psychological success can occur when the person experiences work as more than a job or career—when it is a calling.” Referring to any profession, they describe calling as “work that a person perceives as his purpose in life” (p. 160). With an internal drive component, they describe it as an enriching psychological involvement that is a “highly individual, subjective experience” (p. 161). Calling is viewed as a continuous process versus a one-time event (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011). The construction of calling is “an ongoing, cyclical process, involving, deep exploration of personal goals, trial efforts, and reflection on success, all of which are part of the processes of career self-exploration and discernment” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 165). In summary, as best described by Duffy et al. (2011):

According to this definition, individuals with a calling to a particular area of work perceive it as coming from a force “beyond the self” (e.g., God, a social need, a family legacy); includes a sense that work can be helpful to people or the broader society, even if indirectly; and suggests that a calling helps facilitate a broader sense of purpose in life. This approach also conceptualizes calling as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event; as a continuous variable that applies to individuals as a matter of degree, rather than a binary concept that one either experiences entire or not at all; and as something that people may currently experience (“presence” of calling) or may be seeking (“search” for calling). (p. 210)

#### **2. Qualities of Calling**

Novak (1996) lists the following qualities of a calling: (1) “Each person’s calling is unique” (as cited in Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 161) to the individual; (2) there are preconditions to having a calling such as having a talent, passion, and an open mind toward having a calling; (3) calling provides psychological benefits such as personal satisfaction and exuberance; and (4) each calling is not easy to develop to full bloom.

Having a calling requires much personal time, thought, and care because it involves a strong sense of meaning toward serving in a career domain. Other characteristics of a calling are (1) an understanding that an individual has a calling; (2) a realization that an individual's job serves and influences others; and (3) an organized method for each individual to reach a sound career path for his or her life (Hall & Chandler, 2005). An individual can reach a calling at any stage of his or her life (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Calling is malleable as it can easily evolve at any time in someone's life and is formed by antecedent factors that can increase or decrease a person's calling over time (Dobrow, 2013).

### **3. Predictors of Calling**

Dobrow (2013) provides some antecedents of calling, including "people's ability, behavioral involvement, and social comfort in the area toward which they feel a calling" (p. 431). These antecedents can increase or decrease calling while also resulting in other positive work-related outcomes. For example, ability creates a domino effect, resulting in a high motivational spirit, passionate energy, and urgency (Winner, 2000). Ability involves having the competency and capacity to pursue the calling of choice (Dobrow, 2013). Through professional guidance, Dobrow explains, helping others discover a stronger sense of identity may help them develop a further calling. Because calling can transform over time, Dobrow's research encourages people to develop their calling over time rather finding a calling alone.

### **4. Benefits to Studying Calling**

Individuals with a calling gain a competitive advantage from having positively work-related traits or career enhancing personal skills such as a strong awareness of adaptability and the ability to capture true self-awareness (Briscoe & Hall, 1999) with great self-confidence (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Calling manifests in people who are more flexible and able to adapt, so they are more likely to have high initiative, be highly involved in goal-setting, and be personally satisfied (Hall & Chandler, 2005). These characteristics (high goal-orientation, self-identify, and innate confidence) positively

shape professional performance, resulting in greater opportunity to reach “objective and subjective success” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 166). Dobrow’s (2013) study of musicians and their calling promotes the concept that people should experience a calling “in order to improve their career decision making and their lives overall” (p. 446). Studying calling to understand its impact and influence on occupations can help lead to positive effects in the military.

Duffy et al.’s (2011) study of 370 employees in different professions reveal how “career commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment” (p. 210) positively correlate to calling while turnover intention negatively relates to calling. People who have a calling reflect the highest job attendance, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction compared to others with no calling (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). In Dobrow’s (2007) study of musicians, ability and demographics were not related to musicians who felt they had a calling, but a level of family upbringing in the music business, engagement in music activities, personal satisfaction of practicing music skills, and social interactions with their peers fostered calling. The study of zookeepers by Bunderson and Thompson (2009) exclaimed that “occupational identification, occupational importance, work meaningfulness, and perceived organizational study” are all related to calling (as cited in Duffy et al., 2011, p. 211). Other studies have been conducted on how calling correlates with or leads to other work-related variables “such as decidedness, self-efficacy, and vocational self-clarity” (Duffy et al., 2011, p. 211). Studying calling can unlock further mysteries in shaping more positive work outcomes and create more benefits in the workplace for individuals and organizations.

Conducting more research on determining how individual employees view career success and using more qualitative measures to achieve better outcomes tied to work may reveal how greater success can be achieved from both an employee’s and employer’s standpoint (Heslin, 2005). Studies of calling may potentially associate to more positive experiences and individual well-being results in the military. The concepts of calling and its implications to the military profession have been explored by few as very limited research exists in the area.

## **B. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT**

### **1. Qualities of Organizational Commitment**

Organizational commitment is the allegiance to remain working within a particular organization (Cohen, 2003). It is also described as the perceived strength of an employee's association with and active involvement with their employer (Steers, 1977). Furthermore, the extent of commitment may be described as follows: "(1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974, p. 604). It is generally a positive response toward employment conditions within an organization (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Organizational commitment can be dissected into three different areas: "affective, continuance, and normative" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67). *Affective* commitment reflects the emotional aspect of commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). *Continuance* commitment describes the idea of staying committed to an employer due to all the costs involved with departing (Meyer & Allen, 1991). *Normative* commitment occurs when an employee is feeling obligated toward his or her employer (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Of all the types of commitment, affective is considered the most important type because it is a predictor of many positive outcomes (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). It has a negative correlation with turnover (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). There is a strong link between performance executed in the workplace and affective commitment (Riketta, 2002).

### **2. Predictors of Commitment**

In Briscoe and Finkelstein's (2009) study, organization mobility predicts organizational commitment. For example, people who are likely to move frequently are less likely to be emotionally attached to their employer, leading to less commitment in the workplace (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009). Organizational culture serves as a major role in moderating PCO and organizational commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009).

Mentorship and career development enhance affective and continuance organizational commitment (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009, p. 246; Payne & Huffman, 2005).

Job satisfaction can also lead to commitment (Steers, 1977). People who are perceived to have a higher calling are likely to be more committed (Duffy et al., 2011). Values such as self-direction and vision can lead to affective and normative organizational commitment, especially in those with PCO (Abbott, White, & Charles, 2005). People with PCO are proactive individuals (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009). Career commitment is a predictor of organizational commitment (Blau, 1988; 1989). People who are high achievers are predicted to be more committed to their work (Steers, 1977).

In Steer's (1977) research of scientists, engineers, and hospital workers, personal qualities, "job characteristics, and work experiences" draw the explanation for individuals committed to their organization (p. 46). Job characteristics comprised "autonomy, variety, feedback, task identity," and potential relationships with professional peers (p. 49). With the highest correlation to commitment, work experiences included the collective thoughts and feelings toward the employer. Collective thoughts and feelings accounted for whether individuals' expectations matched the job, conveyed a sense of importance in the organization, and felt the employer showed commitment to its employees (Steers, 1977). Numerous research studies show that there is a wide assortment of factors that influence organizational commitment.

### **3. Outcomes of Commitment**

Organizational commitment reveals the effectiveness of the organization as a whole (Steers, 1975; 1977; Schein, 1970). Higher commitment bolsters employees' intent to stay in the organization, increasing employee retention (Steers, 1977). Research findings suggest that more committed individuals execute better work performance than those who are less committed (Mowday, Porter, & Dubin, 1974). Commitment provides several positive aspects toward the contributions of employment.

## **C. CAREER FIT**

### **1. Qualities of Career Fit**

Career fit is “the extent to which an individual’s career experiences are compatible with his or her needs, values, interests, and talents” (Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Linnehan, 2000, p. 72). It is when people choose professions that match those personal characteristics (Parasuraman et al., 2000). In summary, Parasuraman et al. (2000) explained career fit “occurs when one’s work environment provides career development opportunities that meet the individual’s needs for career success, or when he/she has the talents or abilities to seize the career opportunities provided by his/her job organization” (as cited in Cha, Kim, & Kim, 2009, p. 1861).

### **2. Predictors of Career Fit**

Antecedents of career fit are high self-esteem, professional competencies, and skills (Parasuraman et al., 2000). Individuals must be competent and have the required skills in their field to be fit for their career. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to chase after opportunities that suit their personal qualities and wishes as they have the motivation to do so (Parasuraman et al., 2000). The combination of these characteristics predict individuals who will more likely have career fit.

### **3. Outcomes of Career Fit**

Career fit generates positive work outcomes such as career effectiveness (Parasuraman et al., 2000). Career fit creates positive attitudes at work and stability in a career (Blau, 1987; Smart, Elton, & McLaughlin, 1986; Spokane, 1985). People who are categorized as career fit individuals are more likely to be proactively engaged in positive contributions in the workplace (Parasuraman et al., 2000). Career fit has also been known to positively impact performance in the workplace (Cha et al., 2009). Cha et al.’s (2009) study of research and development (R&D) professionals show that people who are identified as career fit are more likely to have positive mindsets at work and toward their role in the organization. Furthermore, they are also more likely to have high

organizational commitment and optimal job satisfaction (Cha et al., 2009). Shanafelt et al.'s (2009) study of physicians in revealed that maximizing career fit generates more satisfaction, lowers burnouts, and reduces turnover.

## **D. TURNOVER**

### **1. Qualities of Turnover**

Research has addressed turnover, both voluntary (actually quitting) and turnover intention (expecting to quit). My study will refer to turnover intention but the literature review will include voluntary turnover as well. Turnover ends employment ties and commitment (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Turnover intention is described as “the organization’s employees’ plan to leave their jobs or to fire the employees” (Saeed, Waseem, Sikander, & Rizwan, 2014, p. 243). Turnover intention uncovers a signal to turnover (Kraut, 1975; Mobley, 1977).

### **2. Predictors to Turnover**

Turnover can occur throughout different stages of a person’s career or employment. An individual with increased absences and tardiness at work may be a sign toward turnover (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008). A person’s overall health, family priorities, and performance can easily lead to turnover (Weiss, Ilgen, & Borman, 2010). Some people are willing to give up an income to care for their child or children. A change in marital status or family dynamics has led to people leaving their jobs (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). Other broad antecedents to turnover are person–organization fit (Marshall-Mies et al., 2007), personality and physical conditioning (Knapp & Heffner, 2010), vocational desires (Van Iddekinge, Putka, & Campbell, 2011), and personal behaviors (Ingerick, Diaz, & Putka, 2009). Many personal factors can easily affect turnover.

Job embeddedness foreshadows lack of turnover (Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014). In addition to person–organization fit, person–environment fit inversely correlates to turnover because it reduces turnover (Knapp, Sager, & Tremble, 2005). Knapp and Tremble (2007) predicted attrition in the Army through their surveys that measured

person–environment fit. Both person–organization and person–environment fit affecting turnover have been applied in the military research (Holtom, Lindsay, Smith, & Burton, 2014). In addition to environmental factors, a person’s cognitive ability toward an occupation can affect turnover (Chen & Ployhart, 2006). The different fit factors all have relationships with turnover.

Social support positively correlates to the collective attitudes at work and is another great consideration to the promise of reducing turnover (Chen & Ployhart, 2006). Emotional intelligence is considered an ingredient of strong working relationships and reduces turnover intention (Saeed et al., 2014). Many employed people look forward to seeing their friends and their supervisors at work when they benefit from the social bonding and support from them. The leader–member exchange relationship at work influences turnover (Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982). The higher the leader–member exchange is at work, the lower the expectations are for turnover intention (Saeed et al., 2014).

Other positive job attitudes that can spark the reduction of turnover are job satisfaction (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000) and organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). The stronger the bond an individual has with his or her employer, the less likely he or she will leave (Saeed et al., 2014). Those who find their work challenging and tasks important are also less likely to leave (Chen & Ployhart, 2006). Higher job performance leads to lower turnover intention among personnel (Saeed et al., 2014). Many reasons, work and non-work related, contribute to turnover.

### **3. Outcomes of Turnover**

Turnover comes with a price tag for employers in the form of money and time. As a part of the burden that turnover can place on an organization, employers may have to give severance pay or conduct exit interviews (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). When people leave an organization, the organization loses all of those employees’ specific experiences (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). As a result, high turnover often translates to poor performance or lower production overall (Hausknecht, Trevor, & Howard, 2009; Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2005). It takes time for people to get up to speed with a new job and build



experience. For employers, it takes time to hire and train new employees. High turnover creates extra disruptions and frustrations for management as more time must be spent on hiring and training versus supervisory tasks (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). Turnover negatively impacts an organization's financial status as turnover results in extra expenses (Heavey, Holwerda, & Hausknecht, 2013; Park & Shaw, 2013).

When there is high turnover, employers can expect low morale (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). When individuals see their coworkers leave, they may feel unhappy because that colleague affected their work satisfaction (Saeed et al., 2014). People also find it difficult to get acquainted with new coworkers. Turnover changes the diversity of an organization's workforce, especially when women leave (Hom, Roberson, & Ellis, 2008). One positive outcome for employers regarding turnover is when poor performers leave (Abelson, & Baysinger, 1984). Turnover affects an employer in many ways.

## **E. POTENTIAL MEDIATORS**

### **1. Life Satisfaction**

#### ***a. Qualities of Life Satisfaction***

Life satisfaction is categorized as a person's subjective evaluation of his or her life as a whole (Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005; Myers & Diener, 1995). It compares how people view life versus how they think it should be (Paschali & Tsitsas, 2010). Life satisfaction is the fulfillment of an individual's needs and desires (Oladipo, Adenaike, Adejumo, & Ojewumi, 2013).

#### ***b. Predictors of Life Satisfaction***

Many variables influence life satisfaction. Individuals who are identified as having a calling are more likely to achieve job and life satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2011). Personality traits such as extroversion, high self-esteem, resilience, open-mindedness to new experiences, and optimism are antecedents to life satisfaction (Compton, 2005). Occasional positive emotional experiences lead to life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Social factors such as positive social relationships and social support help people steer toward life satisfaction (Compton, 2005). Environmental aspects of an

individual's life such as life experiences, events, and living conditions contribute to life satisfaction (Oladipo et al., 2013). Many factors help shape life satisfaction for individuals.

**c. *Outcomes of Life Satisfaction***

Outcomes of life satisfaction generate numerous personal benefits. People who are happy with their lives are more likely to not only chase after their goals but also reach them (Bailey, Eng, Frisch, & Snyder, 2007). They are more likely to feel less depression, hopelessness, emotional and behavior problems, and have lower levels of neuroticism (Oladipo et al., 2013; Suldo & Huebner, 2004; Gilman, Meyers, & Perez, 2004). People with high levels of satisfaction are more likely to gather social support from many sources and have better cognitive traits than people with low levels of satisfaction (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Achieving high levels of life satisfactions generates numerous positive effects.

**2. *Career Plateau***

**a. *Qualities of Career Plateau***

A career plateau is experienced when chances of upward mobility or increased responsibility within an organization is low (Ference, Stoner, & Warren, 1977). Career plateau also refers to stability in employment with no mobility (Tremblay, Roger, & Toulouse, 1995). Two types of career plateaus are content and structural (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). A structural plateau refers to employees who are unlikely to be promoted within an organization due to the organization's structure that offers low promotion opportunities (Ference et al., 1977; Bardwick, 1986). Content plateau specifically identifies with individuals who do not have anything new to learn at work as they are already proficient with everything (Bardwick, 1986). Task dissatisfaction is associated with content plateau (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). Employees with content plateaus are dissatisfied as they feel limited with the content of their work and a lack of challenge (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002). Both types of plateaus are negatively related to personal development satisfaction (Ference et al., 1977).

The focus of my research will rely primarily on content plateaus. Studying structural plateaus would not provide much value in the military environment. For both enlisted and officers, the military provides a favorable structure for promotion opportunities based on time and performance. Some promotions are automatic with time in service such as from O-1 to O-3. Many programs also exist for enlisted personnel to become commissioned officers such as seaman to admiral. Military personnel are expected to promote and progress during their service. From entering the service until retirement, a military member cannot stay in the same rank. In the military environment, a content plateau is more likely to occur than a structural plateau. Throughout my ten years of service, I have often heard of complaints of other service members claiming their job is too easy with minimal tasks, especially in shore duty tours. In the study of calling, content plateau in the military is more practical and beneficial.

***b. Predictors of Career Plateau***

Many personal or organizational reasons can explain a career plateau. An employer's evaluation of an employee can be a predictor of whether he or she has faced a career plateau (FERENCE et al., 1977). Those employees who are found by their employers to not be competent or those who have no desire to move up are not likely to be offered promotion opportunities (FERENCE et al., 1977). Organizations downsizing because of economic downturns can explain limited promotion opportunities (Weiner, Remer, & Remer, 1992; Tremblay et al., 1995). A current organization's structure may also have very few opportunities for many of its employees to be promoted (Elsass & Ralston, 1989). Also, many people have good personal reasons to plateau, such as health concerns, with no wishes for increased responsibility in an organization (Weiner et al., 1992). Not everyone is interested in an increased salary or the stress that comes with additional responsibilities (Tremblay et al., 1995)

***c. Outcomes of Career Plateau***

Career plateaus have numerous negative implications on both employees and employers in the form of turnover intention (Heilmann, Holt, & Rilovick, 2008), low work satisfaction, low work performance, low organizational commitment (Nachbagauer

& Riedl, 2002), low organizational identification (Chao, 1990), and absenteeism (Near, 1985). Plateaus negatively affect organizational commitment, leading more employees to leave (Wang, Hu, Hurst, & Yang, 2014; Tremblay et al., 1995). Lower productivity and negative reflection on work performance occurs when employees detach themselves as they become less involved at work (Elsass & Ralston, 1989; Rotondo & Perrewé, 2000). Career plateau leads to a lot of negative work attitudes, including low motivation, as plateaued employees may feel that their employer thinks less of them (Nachbagauer & Riedl, 2002).

Career plateaus carry many negative psychological effects as well. While feeling a discrepancy at a stage in their career, plateaued individuals have a tendency to experience higher levels of anxiety and emotional distress (Wang et al., 2014; Elsass & Ralston, 1989). Individuals who reach career plateaus are more likely to face higher levels of stress, disappointment, and depression (McCleese, Eby, Scharlau, & Hoffman, 2007). Burke's (1989) research shows that people plateauing in their career are more likely to have psychological or physical withdrawal.

### **3. Social Capital**

#### ***a. Qualities of Social Capital***

Social capital can be described in many ways, but most often it refers to the social resources individuals can share and benefit from (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). In greater detail, social capital represents the shared resources gathered from personal and professional relationships in the form of: "information, ideas, leads, business opportunities, financial capital, power and influence, emotional support," etc. (Baker, 2000, p. 1). Social capital is also labeled as goodwill brought by social relationships (Adler & Kwon, 2002). It is a capital that can grow or multiply over time but it needs occasional maintenance, such as renewing social relationships, to be effective (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

***b. Predictors of Social Capital***

“Opportunity, motivation, and ability” are required ingredients in achieving social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 35). Spending the time to develop relationships contributes to social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002). It takes time to grow and develop social capital as well as efforts to maintain it (Tymon & Stumpf, 2003). Those who are involved with cultivating talent, fostering intelligence, and improving education of others are likely to garner social capital (Baker, 2000). Last but not least, the power of luck combined with “talent, intelligence, education,” and effort helps predict social capital (Baker, 2000, p. 3).

***c. Outcomes of Social Capital***

Social capital is considered to be generally productive. “It enables us to create value, get things done, achieve our goals, fulfill our missions in life, and make our contributions to the world” (Baker, 2000, p. 2). It is considered a necessary drive in order to achieve individual success, organizational success, and satisfaction in life (Baker, 2000; Arnold & Cohen, 2008). A longer lifespan, improved mental and physical health, living a more purposeful life, happiness, and contribution to a better world are products of social capital (Baker, 2000).

Social capital provides many positive effects for individuals and organizations. It helps lead individuals to job opportunities (Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981) and achieve career success (Gabbay & Zuckerman, 1998). Social capital increases shared information and knowledge not just for individuals, but also companies (Adler & Kwon, 2002). For organizations, social capital brings a richer talent pool (Fernandez, Castilla, & Moore, 2000) while lowering turnover rates (Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993). Career support helps elevate job and career satisfaction (Arnold & Cohen, 2008).

Social capital sparks innovation (Adler & Kwon, 2002) and entrepreneurship (Chong & Gibbons, 1997). Good social capital increases “venture capital and financing” opportunities and reduces bankruptcy and organizational takeover attempts (Baker, 2000, p. 25). The effectiveness of cross-functional teams and strong supplier relationships are other results of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002). More “influence, control, and

power” are other results of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 29). Social capital creates a sense of solidarity (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Individuals and organizations benefit from outcomes of social capital. In summary, “social capital can create career opportunities that foster personal development and provide career support” while increasing “an individual’s capacity to create, identify, and realize career opportunities across organizations and industries throughout an entire career” (DiRenzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2015, p. 14).

#### **4. Protean Career Orientation (PCO)**

##### ***a. Qualities of Protean Career Orientation***

“PCO represents a predisposition toward a self-directed and values-based approach to one’s career, which may lead individuals to take personal initiative over career management and development” (DiRenzo, 2010, p. 64). PCO is considered high when a person is both self-directed and motivated by his or her values (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). It is when the individual’s, not the organization’s, values steer career decisions (Hall, 2004). Individuals with high PCO are identified as always eager to learn and consider new opportunities (Hall, 2004). In summary, their “personal success depends on their own personal principles and actively managing the career themselves” (Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, & Henderickx, 2008, p. 214). Individuals with PCO consider success as subjective (Hall, 2004). Those with protean career styles are more interested in their personal values and less on external rewards such as money, recognition, or promotion (Segers et al., 2008).

##### ***b. Predictors of Protean Career Orientation***

A combination of several traits and characteristics can lead to PCO. A pair of adaptability and self-awareness traits are antecedents to PCO (Hall, 2004). Challenges that increase abilities through personal growth motivate people with PCO (Segers et al., 2008). Self-confidence is another contributing factor to PCO (Hall, 2004). Scholars have also suggested that developmental support from mentors, supervisors, and other leaders can help shape a stronger PCO among individuals (DiRenzo et al., 2015).

*c. Outcomes of Protean Career Orientation*

PCO links to several career outcomes. People with protean career attitudes are propelled to continue to learn and seek new challenges (Segers et al., 2008). With a higher ability to adapt to performance and learning demands in their career, they are more suited to lead people (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009). Moreover, those high in PCO “define and find their own career path” (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006, p. 43). They also strive to achieve better values and establish their own career goals (DiRenzo et al., 2015). Therefore, they tend to be actively involved in career planning which helps them achieve higher “levels of human, social, and psychological capital” (DiRenzo, 2010, p. 132). Because of this, those high in PCO tend to achieve greater career success, “employability, and work-life balance” (DiRenzo et al., 2015, p. 8).

**F. SUMMARY**

Limited research on calling within the military exists. More research has been conducted on professions outside the military such as artists, musicians, and business professionals. My study uncovered some gaps from past research studies. Also, this report provides greater awareness to the work-related framework of calling and its practical applications in the military. My study examines how PCO moderates the impact of calling in life satisfaction and how social capital moderates calling’s relationship to career plateau. Overall, my report explains how career plateau and life satisfaction are mediators to calling and its effects on career fit, organizational commitment, and turnover. This study explains how calling relates to positive outcomes in the military. Furthermore, my research encourages further studies of calling in the military to benefit future generations and offer similar ties to other studies conducted outside the military.

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### **III. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

Understanding how people derive meaning in their lives and work toward a particular passion in a profession is not only fascinating, but can also help shape more positive outcomes for individuals and organizations. Dobrow (2013) showcases that having a calling becomes a “predictor of career and general life consequences” (p. 433). These consequences have been related to positive outcomes such as low absenteeism, better health, and job and life satisfaction (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009).

This study focuses on three primary outcomes: career fit, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. I focus on these outcomes because they exert a strong influence on retention and motivation. The military has increased interests in improving retention while increasing motivation among its personnel. This study seeks to explain the relationship between calling and each of the outcomes mentioned previously through the theoretical lens of well-being. Well-being is described as the state and balance of “happiness, life satisfaction, and” personal growth (Vallerand, 2012, p. 1). Those who have high well-being have better health, healthier relationships, and higher performance (Huppert, 2009; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Well-being also affects turnover and commitment outcomes. Low well-being has been associated with absenteeism and turnover (Wright & Bonett, 2007). On the contrary, those with high well-being are poised to be more committed to their employer (Wright & Bonett, 2007).

This study uses two perspectives of well-being: subjective and psychological (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Subjective well-being represents an individual’s feelings and beliefs regarding happiness and life satisfaction (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Happiness stems from experiencing more positive emotions than negative ones (Bradburn, 1969). DiRenzo (2010) characterized life satisfaction as “an assessment of one’s quality of life based on individually defined criteria” (p. 24). Furthermore, “life satisfaction reflects the overall satisfaction one has with his or her life, or general contentment with life as a whole” (DiRenzo, 2010, p. 24). As a complement to subjective well-being, psychological well-being focuses on the growth and potential of an individual (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryff (1995) explained psychological well-being as “the

striving for perfection that represents the realization of one's true potential" (p. 100). Accordingly, research conceptualizes psychological well-being comprising six components: "autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, environmental mastery, and positive relations" (DiRenzo, 2010, p. 25). Those elements contribute to the sense of thriving and personal growth that characterizes psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). As will be discussed later, this study uses life satisfaction and lack of content plateaus as indicators of subjective and psychological well-being.

With regards to career fit, research indicated that those who identify their careers as a calling are more likely to be committed to that career (Duffy et al., 2011). Also, people with a calling have a higher sense of understanding and commitment toward the goals and decisions they make in their career (Hirschi, 2011). Having a passion and serving with meaning in a career draw people to be more committed to their career. As such, they want to continue to develop their true calling as it increases their passion and motivation.

In addition to career fit, calling is likely to impact organizational commitment and turnover as well. Studies of organizational commitment have revealed that it relates to other outcomes at work such as turnover and job satisfaction (Cheng, Chi, & Mio, 2007; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005). Duffy et al. (2011) suggested that the higher the calling, the more committed a person is to an employer and the less likely he or she is to leave. Professionals with a calling are known to have higher coping skills (Treadgold, 1999). Those with a calling are likely to overcome challenges in their career and stress on the job. Moreover, pursuing a passion toward a career helps drive people to grow and develop in their professional path. Therefore, they are likely be committed to organizations that enable them to pursue these passions and likely to remain with their organizations for the long-term.

***Hypothesis 1: Calling is positively related to (a) career fit and (b) organizational commitment and negatively related to (c) turnover intention.***

The two perspectives of well-being help explain the influence of calling on the career related outcomes in this study. Life satisfaction is one of the primary representations of subjective well-being. Building upon Hypothesis 1, I suggest that life satisfaction draws the link between calling and the work-related factors of career fit, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Individuals with a calling are more likely to be content with their job and life (Duffy et al., 2011). People who are called to a particular domain experience “lower levels of stress and depression” (Treadgold, 1999, p. 92) and are therefore more likely to be content or pleased with their lives. Moreover, the great value placed on the sense of purpose and meaning in a livelihood enables people with a calling to be happier overall. Living a life filled with meaning and purpose is an accomplishment that individuals with a calling strive for and find happiness in. As such, the more people are able to fulfill their calling in their career, the greater passion they will feel, and the happier and generally more satisfied with their lives they will be.

***Hypothesis 2: Calling is positively correlated to life satisfaction.***

Whereas subjective well-being is characterized by high levels of life satisfaction, psychological well-being suggests growth, thriving and reaching one’s potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Career plateaus represent a lack of personal and career growth and this study conceptualizes them as representing low psychological well-being (McCleese et al., 2007). Content plateaus occur when an employee does not experience challenging tasks or does not learn anything new at work (Bardwick, 1986). Calling will likely be negatively correlated with content plateaus because those with a calling are prone to seek, desire, and achieve career growth. It is well-established that motivation induces positive outcomes at work such as career growth (London, 1983). Individuals with a calling are highly motivated and determined because they have a sincere passion toward their chosen career path (Wells, 2012). Their high passion and motivation drive them to find new meaningful challenges and ways to enhance their professional skills. Hence, people with a calling are likely to continuously learn and develop throughout their careers.

Moreover, an important component of motivation is resilience (Jung & Tak, 2008). People high in calling are likely to be resilient because an important part of resilience is “finding meaning in one’s environment” (Coutu, 2002, p. 6). Resilience is described as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Martin & Marsh, 2006, p. 3; Howard & Johnson, 2000). Having a great overall understanding of meaning in life, resilient people “build bridges from present-day hardships to a fuller, more construed future” (Coutu, 2002, p. 5). As such, resilience is the strength that will allow anyone with a calling to tear down barriers that may hinder career growth. That is, the resilience within individuals with a calling will allow them to adapt and overcome obstacles that may contribute to career plateaus.

***Hypothesis 3: Calling is negatively correlated to career plateaus.***

I further suggest that calling’s effect on career fit, organizational commitment, and turnover intention is mediated by life satisfaction. People who are content with their jobs and lives overall are expected to feel more committed to their careers and have lower intentions to find employment elsewhere (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez, 2001). The attitude and feelings that people have toward their work represents the majority of their life satisfaction or lack of. Life satisfaction generates a sense of contentment overall (Pavot & Diener, 1993). With a spillover effect, those who are content with their lives are likely to perceive their career as a good fit.

Like career fit, those who are satisfied with their life overall are believed to be happy in their organization and stay committed to it. Many professionals spend a majority of their time at work. Therefore, life satisfaction is inherently tied to the satisfaction individuals receive at work. Professionals who are happy at work are likely to maintain the status quo. Just as happily married couples are expected to stay within their marriage and not seek divorce, happy individuals are more committed to their employer with less intentions to leave.

***Hypothesis 4: Life satisfaction slightly mediates the relationships between calling (a) career fit, (b) organizational commitment, and (c) turnover intention.***

In addition to life satisfaction, career plateaus likely mediate the relationship between calling and the work-related outcomes of career fit, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Weng (2010) described growth in the following aspects: achieving career goals, developing professional skills, promoting within an organization, and being paid according to one's abilities. Anticipating growth in an individual's career can lead to the perception he or she discovered the right career. Experiencing a career plateau should produce the opposite effect—feelings that his or her job or line of work is a poor fit. A sense of career growth leads one to be closer to experiencing career fit. Career development or experiencing growth in a career involves refining and enhancing one's skill to be a master at his or her craft. Professionals contemplate on how their skills and values match their career choice while viewing opportunities for professional growth in their organization (Schein, 1978; Foster, Shastri, & Withane, 2011). Those experiencing career growth are likely to be more motivated toward polishing their skills, ultimately leading to career fit. Those in a plateau are likely to be less motivated than those who experience career growth and are therefore more likely to consider changing professions.

Career plateaus have negative connotation for individuals and employers due to the many negative effects associated with them. Career plateaus reduce organizational commitment (Nauchbagauer & Riedl, 2002) and increase turnover intention (Heilmann, et al., 2008). Specifically, the result of a lack of challenges and tasks at work negatively impact affective and continuance commitment (Nauchbagauer & Riedl, 2002). When individuals view themselves as being plateaued in their career, they are likely to display frustration (Foster et al., 2011). The frustration that people experience while being plateaued leads to the increased likelihood for them to leave their organization (Foster et al., 2011). Conversely, career growth has shown positive effects on organizational commitment (Agarwala, 2003; Ahmad & Bakar, 2003; DeConik & Stillwell, 1996).

***Hypothesis 5: Career plateaus slightly mediate the relationships between calling and (a) career fit, (b) organizational commitment, and (c) turnover intention.***

Protean career orientation (PCO) strengthens the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. As previously stated in Hypothesis 2, serving in a meaningful and purposeful career leads people with a calling to experience life satisfaction. PCO can intensify that effect due to its self-direction and values-driven components. Proactive individuals achieve higher degrees of “career success, employability, and work-life balance” (DiRenzo, 2010, p. 138; Baruch & Quick, 2007; Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Briscoe et al., 2006; De Vos & Soens, 2008; DiRenzo et al., 2015; Hall, 2004; Hall & Richter, 1990). The higher self-drive and stronger values a person with a calling has bolsters the passion and motivation within him or her to reach his or her career dreams. More motivated and passionate individuals with a calling who are more self-driven, guided with self-direction tend to be more proactive in reaching their professional goals and attaining success in their career. Achieving that success leads them to greater overall satisfaction with their lives. Individuals with a calling who display a higher PCO are more likely to propel themselves in their career by seeking more social networking, professional growth, and other career enhancing opportunities. They are on a fast track to be more industrious and deliver success in their chosen career field unlike those who lack PCO. The higher PCO among people with a calling allow them to experience life satisfaction to a greater extent than those who exhibit low PCO.

Overall, personnel gifted with PCO have a stronger whole-life perspective (DiRenzo et al., 2015). Driven by higher values, people with a calling are more likely to pursue their intrinsic goals than people who exhibit lower values. The lower values and lower self-drive in those with a calling lead to less satisfaction in life as they possess less motivation, passion, and lower whole-life perspective than those with high PCO. For example, people with higher values who are called to military service is their primary motivation. Those called individuals with lower values will reflect more interest in external factors such as monetary compensation, benefits package, etc. It would be more difficult to satisfy or to further motivate those with a lower PCO, especially if monetary compensation and benefits provided do not meet their wishes. Fulfilling one’s calling will

be more satisfying for someone who is driven by higher values as he or she needs less extrinsic motivation and is simply content with having a calling. The level of PCO shapes the life satisfaction effect in those with a calling.

***Hypothesis 6: Protean career orientation (PCO) moderates the positive relationship between calling and life satisfaction in a way that the relationship is stronger for an individual with high PCO versus low PCO.***

Social capital is often a catalyst to career growth. Social capital can be substituted for other resources or can act as a complement to other sources (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Experiencing a calling can compensate for low social capital and vice versa. The pervasive presence of motivation and resilience in those with a calling can overshadow a low social capital. Because those who are motivated and resilient are likely to overcome barriers to career plateau, they have less need to rely on social capital. Even with a low social capital, motivation and resilience in those with a calling propel them to seek other ways to experience career growth.

Similarly, having high social capital can compensate for a lack of calling in one's career. People low in calling are likely less resilient and less internally motivated to seek and find career development opportunities. Therefore, social capital becomes increasingly important for these people as they will find it necessary to rely on these contacts for support and developmental opportunities. Those low in calling will depend more on social capital to achieve career growth and success.

***Hypothesis 7: Social capital moderates the negative relationship between calling and career plateaus in a way that the relationship is stronger for an individual with low social capital than high social capital.***

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships summarized in Hypotheses 1 through 7.

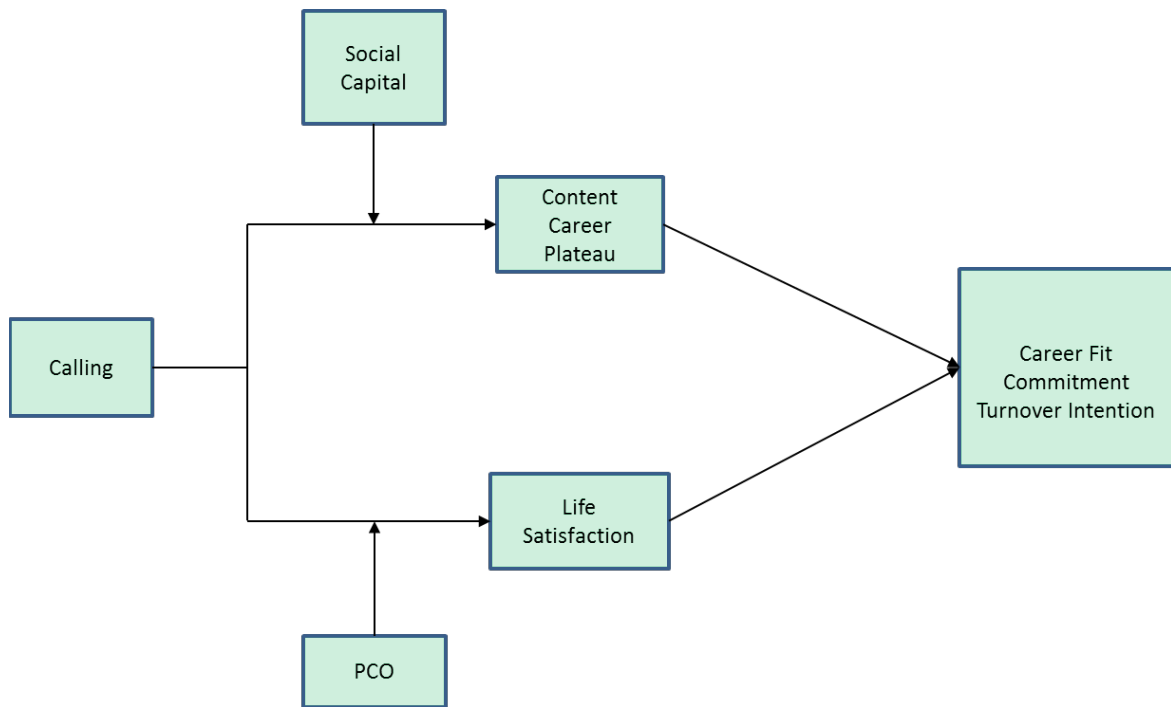


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Calling



## **IV. METHODOLOGY**

### **A. PARTICIPANTS AND PURPOSE**

To test the hypotheses, I examined surveys from active members of the U.S. armed forces at two different times. The surveys were constructed to assess calling and its effects on military members. Participants were officers from all branches of the military who were attending graduate school in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program. Participants were enrolled full time in an 18-month MBA program at Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). They were sent an email with a link to complete an online survey at the outset of their program (Time 1). Participants received a follow-up survey 18 months later and just prior to their graduation (Time 2). The final sample included 237 respondents who provided complete responses for both surveys.

Of the 237 respondents included in the sample, 84% were male, with an average age of 33 years ( $SD = 4.70$ , range = 23–57 years) at Time 1. The racial breakdown of the sample was: 74% Caucasian, 7% Asian-American, 6% African-American, 4% Latino/a, and 9% other. Eighty percent reported being married or living with a partner, and 60% had children under 18 years of age ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ , range = 1–5 children). The sample represented various branches of the U.S. military, as follows: 47% Navy, 25% Marines, 14% Army, 9% Air Force, and 2% Coast Guard. The average tenure in the military was 11.62 years at Time 1 ( $SD = 5.22$ , range = 1–27 years), and the average rank was 3.43 ( $SD = 1.10$ , range = 1–8).

### **B. MEASURES**

#### **1. Calling**

I used Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas' (2011) 12-item scale to measure calling at Time 1. Items were worded to represent a calling toward being in the military, for example, "I feel a sense of destiny about being in the military." These items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha was .89.

## **2. Career Fit**

Career fit was assessed at Time 2 via a 4-item scale (Carson & Bedeian, 1994). A sample item is “My line of work/career field is an important part of who I am.” These items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha was .84.

## **3. Organizational Commitment**

I assessed organizational commitment at Time 2 via Allen and Meyer’s (1990) 6-item affective commitment scale. These items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha was .88.

## **4. Turnover Intention**

I measured respondents’ likelihood to leave the military at Time 2 via a 5-item scale (Crossley, Grauer, Lin, & Stanton, 2002). A sample item included, “I will quit this organization as soon as possible.” These items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha was .93.

## **5. Career Plateaus**

I assessed the degree to which respondents felt they had encountered career plateaus at Time 2. I used a 5-item scale developed by Ceralde & Czepiel (2014) to address plateaus related to the content of the job (e.g., “My job responsibilities will increase significantly in the future” (*reverse-scored*)). These items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The coefficient alpha was .81.

## **6. Life Satisfaction**

Life satisfaction was measured at Time 1 using the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha for the scale was .84.

## **7. Protean Career Orientation**

Using a 12-item scale developed by DiRenzo (2010), sample items included the following: “I am personally accountable for how my career develops” and “I judge my level of career success based on whether I achieve my own personal values and ideals.” Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha was .81.

## **8. Social Capital**

I measured social capital at Time 1 using an 11-item scale that combined Eby, Butts, and Lockwood’s (2003) seven-item “knowing-whom” competency measure with four additional items developed by Colakoglu (2005). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Coefficient alpha was .88.

## **9. Controls**

I included several demographic control variables in our analyses, including respondents’ age, gender, branch in the armed forces, and rank. Branch of the military was coded 1 = *Air Force*, 2 = *Army*, 3 = *Coast Guard*, 4 = *Marines*, and 5 = *Navy*. Rank is an ordinal scale ranging from 1–8.

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## V. RESULTS

### A. HYPOTHESIS 1

To test Hypotheses 1–3, I conducted multiple regression analyses. Dependent variables (career fit, organizational commitment, and turnover intention at Time 2) were first regressed on the control variables (age, gender, branch, and rank), then the independent variable, calling at Time 1. Calling was positively correlated with career fit ( $B = .29$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and organizational commitment ( $B = .17$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .007$ ), and was negatively correlated with turnover intention ( $B = -.15$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Thus, Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c were all supported.

### B. HYPOTHESES 2 AND 3

I next examined the relationship of calling to the mediators in our model: life satisfaction and career plateaus. As expected, calling was positively correlated with life satisfaction ( $B = .11$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .04$ ), in support of Hypothesis 2. Calling was negatively correlated with experiencing a career plateau related to job content ( $B = -.11$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .003$ ), thus supporting Hypothesis 3.

### C. HYPOTHESES 4 AND 5

To test Hypotheses 4 and 5, I examined the degree to which life satisfaction and career plateaus mediated the relationship between calling and the dependent variables in our model. I used the PROCESS bootstrapping macro to test for partial mediation ( $n = 5000$ ; Hayes, 2013). I found a significant indirect relationship between calling and organizational commitment ( $effect = .02$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI [.001, .07]) and turnover intention ( $effect = -.04$ ,  $SE = .02$ , 95% CI [-.10, -.04]) through life satisfaction. However, I did not find a significant indirect relationship between calling and career fit through life satisfaction ( $effect = .01$ ,  $SE = .01$ , 95% CI [-.002, .05]). Thus, Hypotheses 4b and 4c were supported, and Hypothesis 4a was not supported.

Looking at career plateaus related to job content as a partial mediator, I found a significant indirect relationship between calling and organizational commitment

(*effect* = -.06, *SE* = .03, 95% CI [.01, .13]). However, I did not find significant indirect effects of calling through career plateaus on career fit (*effect* = .02, *SE* = .02, 95% CI [-.004, .06]) or turnover intention (*effect* = .03, *SE* = .02, 95% CI [-.08, .004]). Thus, Hypothesis 5b was supported, and Hypotheses 5a and 5c were not supported.

#### **D. HYPOTHESES 6 AND 7**

Finally, I examined Hypotheses 6 and 7 by testing the interaction of calling and the moderators, PCO and social capital, on the relevant dependent variables, life satisfaction and career plateaus, respectively. Again, I used the PROCESS bootstrapping macro to test the significance of the interaction ( $n = 5000$ ; Hayes, 2013). In support of Hypothesis 6, there was a significant interaction between calling and PCO on life satisfaction ( $B = .31$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .02$ ). In support of Hypothesis 7, there was a significant interaction between calling and social capital on content-related career plateaus ( $B = -.16$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .01$ ). The shape of the interactions for Hypotheses 6 and 7 can be found in Figures 2 and 3, respectively.

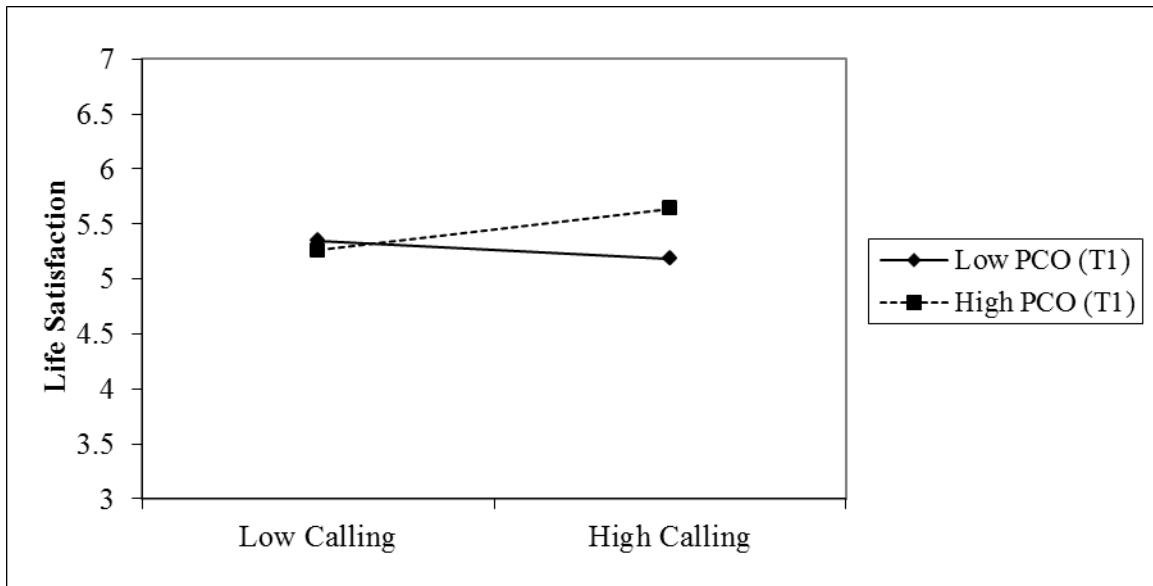


Figure 2. Hypothesis 6: Moderation of Calling-Life Satisfaction by PCO

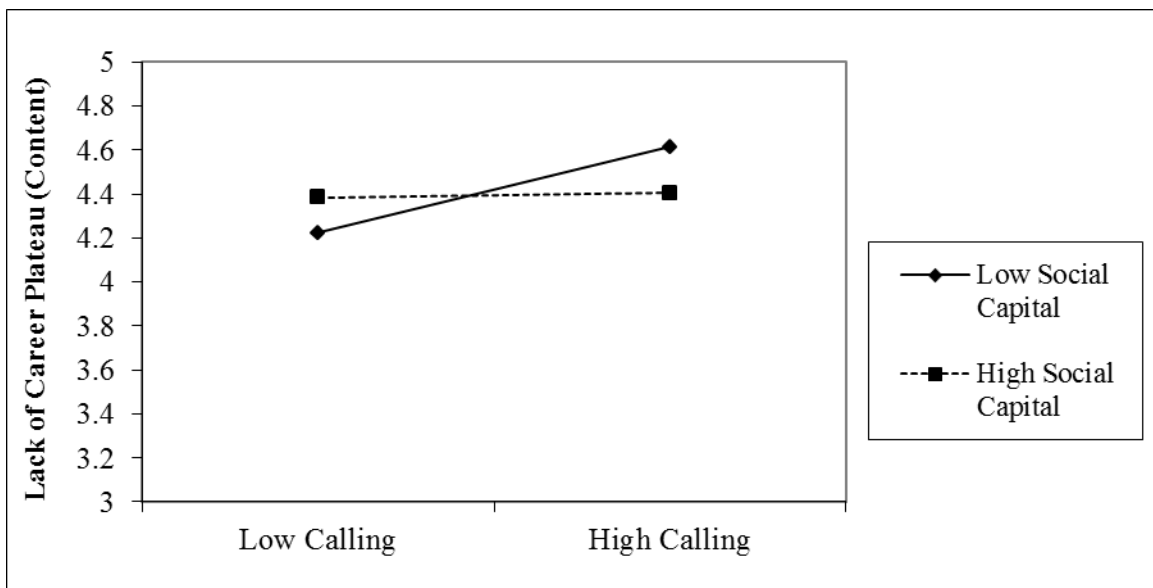


Figure 3. Hypothesis 7: Moderation of Calling-Career Plateau by Social Capital

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## **VI. CONCLUSIONS**

### **A. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **1. Introduction of Findings**

Data extracted from the survey of military NPS students revealed many work-related outcomes linked to calling. Calling is positively correlated with career fit and organizational commitment, and negatively correlated with turnover. Life satisfaction slightly mediates the relationship between calling and organizational commitment and turnover intention. Career plateau slightly mediates the relationship between calling and organizational commitment. While calling is positively correlated with life satisfaction, it is also negatively correlated with career plateaus. PCO modifies the positive relationship between calling and life satisfaction in a way that the correlation is stronger for people with high PCO than low PCO. Social capital moderates the negative relationship between calling and career plateaus in a way that the correlation is stronger for people with low social capital than high social capital. Calling is a positive work construct that can be used in military employment practices to increase commitment and career fit among military individuals while reducing turnover intention.

#### **2. Why Enhance Calling?**

As retaining and promoting the best people will always be good for mission and organizational success, selecting for calling may be the necessary outlet to satisfy retention goals, cost savings, and deliver more positive work-related effects for the military. Calling is more than good for decreasing turnover in the military, because it provides a better military workforce. The military is always looking for ways to increase personnel strength, wealth, and health. Hiring people with a calling is the way to help match the right individuals to the right job, suiting career fit to a military position.

We need to build upon a stable foundation where we nurture and cultivate the talent of our service members for a higher calling for the betterment of all. Through the engagement of calling and professional development, we must draw attention to calling so there is awareness and common understanding throughout the military. We can

certainly take a step further than being just a strong and genuine voice for calling. Assessing calling routinely throughout one's career will shape the military workforce. Content plateaus, which are unhelpful to both individuals and organizations, can be avoided in the military through meaningful career development.

We must recognize the importance for military leadership to have an eye for the calling practice, development, and motivation to generate more positive effects for our service members and the military. Professional engagement of calling not only leads to more military members having more of a career fit for the positions they are expect to fill, but also leads to more committed individuals in the military. The daily interactions we have with other members in the military are key to professional development as we look out for each other's well-being. Intertwined into military leadership development, education, and training, promoting calling cannot be overstated. In turn, this will strengthen our leadership core and shape better leaders at the top of our military chain.

Cementing calling within the military will generate more skills in the military workforce. The more skills service members obtain in the military, the more skills they can bring to the civilian industry when they leave the military. Collectively, calling can provide a bigger contribution to society. More committed people experiencing career fit help drive mission and organizational success for the long haul. Calling will aid in promoting maximum professional success and growth, including long-term.

Putting the best people with a high calling in certain critical or highly demanding career paths should be considered in future planning. Those with a calling should be on a fast-track for higher-level leadership and promotion structure should be revamped to allow maximum career growth. Recruiting more people gifted with a calling, displaying career fit, and commitment to the military would help drive mission and organization success in the long run. Promoting maximum success and growth for both individuals and the military as a whole leads to having the best people with the best outcomes of success.

While the military has been interested in increasing morale for its troops, improving life satisfaction for military members delivers another benefit to the military. The military should concentrate on encouraging service members to fulfill their calling in

a specific career field to increase job and life satisfaction. Ultimately, using calling can improve the health and increase the lifespan with less likelihood of depression for military members across all services. Calling not only benefits individuals and the military organization, but it is good for military families too.

### **3. How Can Calling Be Enhanced?**

The military can employ calling as a career development and force management tool. While fostering calling in the military, we must continue to identify shortfalls in our current employment practices and redefine the incentives we have in place that need improvement. The military should embed calling in its employment practices and generate a passion for calling. Cultivating a talent for calling within all military commands would promote career growth and development. Military leaders should invest in promoting life satisfaction among our military personnel at every command. Those who feel called to military service can spur the growth of calling among military individuals, leading to more of those with a calling.

Proactive leadership and frequent engagement of calling should be the way forward. Calling will require professional maintenance and can be accomplished in many forms. The military should have more formalized and established mentoring sessions in place. The military should invest a minimum of one hour per week toward mentoring and professional development at all commands across all services. The military should formally adopt an “always make time for mentorship” culture. During these mentorship sessions, junior and senior personnel connect, with career development advice tailored to specific individuals. For broader professional development, the military can offer leadership training for all personnel and their peers in group sessions. Admittedly, it takes more resources and time, but it will be achievable and worth it when all military personnel benefit.

Counseling should have a prominent role in military commands. Every senior enlisted leader and officer at a command can be designated as a “career coach.” The military can establish a hotline for career guidance type questions outside the command as well. When military personnel feel that they are not in a command where their career

growth is being nurtured or they are not comfortable with their leadership, they are welcome to receive guidance elsewhere. The military should aim toward providing career guidance for all military personnel with no one left behind.

A healthy, professional, and meaningful method for choosing military personnel who have a calling should start with recruitment. Currently, calling is not being used as a factor in recruitment. Identifying gaps in our current recruitment practices and taking action to bridge those gaps must be done. Calling should be detected in candidates entering the military. The human resources field needs to understand how to ascertain those with a calling and implement that understanding at the recruitment stage. Recruiting should focus on attracting and recruiting those with a calling. It is beneficial to recruit and hire those have a calling to military service. We can expect a better pool of applicants coming in who will generate more commitment and satisfaction in the military.

With calling, we can expect more of the right people for the right job and career. The military needs to focus on placement and detailing at its best. For example, there are unhappy Surface Warfare Officers who want to be Supply Officers. The military should make it easier for people to leave their current designator if they are unhappy and not a good fit for it. Lessening and loosening the requirements for military members to switch designators will enable them to meet career fit and be more satisfied in their career. Encourage career fit and discourage forcing members in a designated career to serve a minimum of four years. Perhaps, the minimum requirement should be reduced to one or two years. In the long-run, we can expect more commitment and less turnover by allowing military members to grow in their desired career field. Also, to achieve more commitment from military members, the military needs to consider being encouraging of more desired tour locations for military members. Do not necessarily discourage military members from homesteading or taking too many overseas tours as long as they are growing professionally as it may dampen the effect of life satisfaction for military members and their families.

The military promotion structure should be revamped to avoid career plateaus. Inspire more calling in the military with a performance-based system leading to higher

professional progress and growth. Cementing more calling incentives within the military can generate more positive and productive results. Perhaps we should consider dismantling our current rigid promotion structure to allow accelerated promotion for those with a military calling who deliver outstanding performance results. To avoid career plateaus, the military should embrace a wholehearted performance-based structure as opposed to a mandatory minimum time in grade or rank structure. We want to avoid discouraging those with a calling, career fit, PCO, and commitment to the military to leave or feel encumbered by the current promotion structure in place.

#### **4. How Do We Capitalize on Calling and Further Enhance its Positive Effects?**

The military can build upon its social capital by increasing its social wealth and resources in the form of calling. The military should offer more leadership forums and conferences to connect people, reaping more rewards from a richer social capital overall. For those unable to attend or unable to travel, allow them to be part of a video conference so that no one is neglected, especially in isolated locations. For example, San Diego and Washington, DC, are popular locations for military conferences and symposiums. Particularly, in my experience, it is not uncommon for Sasebo, Japan, or Patuxent River, MD, to be left out. Having video conferences will allow for consistency and the ability to acquire professional development and support. We should be considerate of raising social capital for all military members in all locations in the United States and throughout the world. Easier access to social and professional support will encourage innovation, freedom of exchange of ideas, and lessons learned throughout the military services and installations, leading to more positive outcomes.

The military should consider the practice of putting more military members in cross-functional teams. Having more experts in different fields and services come together will increase the overall intelligence and understanding among military members in a richer capital pool. When people leave military service, they can also bring a richer talent pool to the civilian industry. As teamwork continues to be imperative, the military can potentially gain more efficiencies with a higher social capital. As social capital boosts the strength of calling and amplifies its positive effects, it can also lead to the

development of more advancements in or new technology to combat the war on terrorism. Social capital not only drives individual career success but also organizational success for the military. Having a richer social capital in the military is a desired and achievable goal.

Increasing PCO among military members is also beneficial. The military should always encourage continuous learning for individuals and allow them to step into new challenges. Instead of monetary values, the military can do more to stimulate personal values among its personnel while allowing some degree of independence in a career path. Promoting the highest degree of PCO can be accomplished through developmental support and leadership engagement. The ways that the military can groom called individuals to raise the level of PCO can generate more life satisfaction, decrease turnover intention, and bolster commitment.

Specifically, PCO can be increased among military personnel by instilling good self-awareness through accurate assessments and seeing the relationships between performance and rewards. The military should not inflate fitness and evaluation reports when people being evaluated are not performing as well as they are described on paper. Inflated reports send mixed messages to individuals when their fitness or evaluation reports are not accurate representations of performance. In addition to no sugar coating on fitness and evaluation reports, I suggest honest verbal feedback regarding performance. Relating honesty to performance is the best way to increase PCO among military personnel.

The military should also remove seniority as a factor in promotion, especially favoritism toward senior people such as placing them on a higher priority of ranking. Not rewarding people solely based on performance distorts self-awareness. At the same time favoritism towards seniority as a factor in promotion punishes junior people especially when they are performing better than people senior to them. Being more senior does not translate to being more mature or a better professional. Furthermore, seniority does not necessarily lead to a higher performance or greater contribution to the military. Favoritism to those who are senior can lead to complacency among senior personnel. The military should not discourage hard-working, proactive junior personnel. This can be

accomplished through fair performance evaluations, in which personnel are held to the same standards across the board despite time in service or time spent in a command. The military should promote leadership positions even at the most junior ranks. By judging solely based on performance among military personnel, it can encourage true self-awareness and proactivity.

Allowing some degree of independence and flexibility in a career path is another way to increase PCO among military personnel. Allowing more freedom in a career can lead to fewer personnel burnouts, higher job satisfaction, and greater commitment. The military should allow some flexibility for military personnel to chart their own career path versus a nearly “fixed” system that requires a specific number of sea tours. It can be achievable and reasonable to have a blended system that allows flexibility of many successful career path choices as well as a few fixed elements. A defined career path set for military personnel is a discouragement to many with PCO who may leave and find employment elsewhere that allows such flexibility for opportunities to success.

The military should encourage the highest degree of PCO among its military personnel. Frequent leadership engagement and development can raise the level of PCO among personnel. Promoting self-confidence within every military individual encourages PCO. Promoting the highest degree of PCO will allow the military to focus less on extrinsic factors such as bonuses and benefits to motivate its personnel. The military will achieve costs savings even if it is not offering bonuses just to encourage people to stay in the service longer. Increasing PCO among military members, especially with a calling, is beneficial in the long run, leading to greater life satisfaction and commitment.

By selecting for and encouraging calling, we can raise standards in all levels of military employment. We need to reevaluate how we are attracting, grooming, motivating, and retaining the best personnel in all commands. So much more can be accomplished by assessing calling routinely throughout one’s career to better redefine and reshape our work force. The military should adopt an organizational culture that recruits, promotes, and treasures those with a calling. Much can be done to increase the pride of the military by having those with a calling. With proactive leadership and

frequent engagement, those with a calling in the military will also be tapped to spur the growth of calling and its positive effects.

## **B. LIMITATIONS**

This study is limited by the number of NPS graduate students, mainly officers in the military. More men than women have been surveyed, given our sample population.

## **C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study provides greater awareness to the work-related framework of calling and practical applications in the military. The aim of this report is to spark future studies and generate overall excitement by maximizing calling within individuals for organizational success for the military and to expand research in creating more positive work-related effects. Because of limited research on calling within the military, future studies should claim a wider range of participants beyond NPS students and military officers in different military schools and commands. Enlisted personnel and more females should be pooled in future research on calling. Perhaps groups within specific designators should be studied and compared to others, understanding calling and its effects within different military career fields. I want to encourage more research in a similar style to test or confirm the relationships in my study while uncovering more links to calling. This study may not have covered all the possible relationships that exist with calling.

The military should consider tracking the calling among individuals upon entry in and exit from the military. The military should look into reviewing the success stories of individuals called to military service and how they progressed over time. This study dares others to be bold in determining the ability of military leaders to detect the fine element of calling within individuals, how they help others develop a calling over time, and promote a calling within their command. There is more to learn about calling and its true effects in the military.

Uncovering more truths to calling may reveal far more powerful advantages and release work-related barriers for individuals and the military organization. As the military has struggled with retention challenges combined with financial constraints, calling for



more practical and reasonable improvements in military employment practices will continue to be the way forward as people continue to be its biggest asset and most prized resource. Calling may be that necessary mechanism to steer a professional path toward increased personnel strength, wealth, and health desired in the military. No matter the path forward, we must always question our personnel core and determine how we can strengthen it. Calling can be used to strengthen the very heart of our personnel. We can raise the bar for military service members to have a higher calling and embrace more positive effects.

The military should focus on embracing an organizational culture that recruits, fosters, and promotes those with a calling. The military can increase its pride by having more of those with a calling to military service. Keys to bridge the pervasive retention gap are emboldening our military personnel, arming them with more leadership tools, and providing them with unyielding, professional support in every step of their professional path from recruitment to retirement. We must continue to discover and embrace positive work factors and changes while nurturing our military personnel in desirable professional climates. We cannot underestimate the importance of career growth and life satisfaction for military service members. The degree of professional care, compassion, education, and training that we instill in our military personnel now, and in the future, is critical.

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